Kokua Hawaii Oral History Project Interview with **Gary T. Kubota**

Gary T. Kubota
Photograph courtesy of Dennis Oda

Gary T. Kubota, born in Honolulu in 1949, was arrested with 31 other people in Kalama Valley on May 11, 1971, in an act of civil disobedience to protest the mass eviction of farmers and Native Hawaiians. As a member of the activist group Kokua Hawaii, Kubota served for a brief time as a writer and editor of Kokua Hawaii's newspaper* Huli. *He later became a Kokua Hawaii community organizer helping to fight the eviction of the Filipino community of Ota Camp in Waipahu in 1971-73, and was a leader in a sit-in to preserve Ethnic Studies at the University of Hawaii-Manoa in 1972. He later became a journalist, working for several Pacific newspapers, receiving national awards for his work including recognition from the National Press Club and National Newspaper Association. His play* The Legend Of Koolau, *which received a National Performance Network grant, is touring nationally. He's also serving as volunteer researcher and liaison for tenants fighting an eviction from Front Street Apartments in Lahaina. He was interviewed by Kawena Kubota on April 10, 2018.

KK: Tell us about yourself. Where were you raised?

GK: For the first seven years of my life, I was raised in veterans' housing called "Kalihi War Homes," with my three sisters, my mother and father. My father was a World War II veteran. Our rented home now is the site of the public housing project Kuhio Park Terrace. I attended Kalihi Waena Elementary School until second grade, then my family moved to a new housing subdivision in Pearl City, closer to my father's work at Pearl Harbor.

KK: Who were your parents?

GK: Both of my parents—Takao Kubota and Yoshie Inouye—were raised in large families in west Kauai. They were children of Japanese immigrants who came to Hawaii in the early 1900s. My grandfather on my mother's side was a stevedore. My grandmother on my mother's side was a picture bride from the farm country of Kumamoto. My grandparents on my father side were Japanese language school teachers from Hiroshima.

KK: What did your father do for a living?

GK: He was an electrician at Pearl Harbor. After World War II, a lot of veterans had the opportunity to learn a trade and work at Pearl Harbor. We moved to upper Pearl City so that he'd be closer to work. That section of Pearl City had been sugarcane fields and was among the first suburbs on the Leeward Coast.

KK: Did your mom work?

GK: She was a housewife when we were children but later worked as a licensed practical nurse at Leeward Oahu Hospital during our teen- age years. It was a lucky thing she had a job, because when I was about 12 or 13, my father became ill.

KK: What happened?

GK: He had what was then called a "nervous breakdown." He would suddenly get angry at my mother and accuse her of things like infidelity, and sometimes talk to dead members in his old WWII combat unit. His breathing would suddenly change and he would stare out our picture window at night for what seemed an eternity. He had schizophrenia and also what I understood decades later was post-traumatic stress disorder from World War II.

KK: That must have been rough?

GK: The rough part was getting help for him, because most of the time he seemed normal. U.S. Army physicians were no help in the beginning. There was very little understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder. It took a few years before the sickness became apparent to everyone and he was institutionalized and treated at Tripler Army Hospital.

KK: How long?

GK: For most of the time I was in high school. Then, he got better.

KK: How much better?

GK: Good enough so he could go back to work but not really good enough so we could invite friends and relatives into our home for any length of time. We never knew when his schizophrenia would return. When it did, he would go from being a friendly, gentle man to an angry, paranoid, accusatory person. It was the family's secret long into my adulthood. Both my parents have passed, and I'm sharing this story because I hope it might bring some understanding to other veterans' families who might be going through a similar experience.

KK: Was it prevalent among his soldier friends?

GK: I came to understand it was. But it wasn't something, and it's still not something, men

in his 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team talked about outside of their families.

KK: Do you think your father's mental illness shaped you as an anti-war activist?

GK: It had a profound effect. As a teen-ager, I felt like I was living with a ticking bomb in the family house long after the war had ended and no one knew how to disarm it. Government officials seem more into military parades and perpetuating the image of Japanese Americans as warriors. My father and other Japanese Americans fought and helped to win World War II. But in American history books, there was little or no acknowledgment of Japanese Americans' contribution. I felt because of this kind of institutionalized racism, guys in my generation were going to face the same racist thing again by fighting in Vietnam. I wasn't going to do it.

KK: Did any of the other 442nd Regimental Combat children become anti-war activist?

GK: I didn't know of any. There were news reports about a couple of Japanese American youths at the University of Hawaii participating in protests. But I didn't know their background, and I wasn't sure I wanted to attach myself to any group. I wasn't asking for anyone's acceptance to do what I was going to do.

KK: What do you want to see happen in terms of the treatment of mental illness and PTSD?

GK: I think every soldier before being discharged should undergo a mental health assessment and undergo an assessment every five to 10 years. Thing is, PTSD can rear up 10, 20, 30 years after military service. A reason why there are so many soldiers who are homeless and encountering social problems is there's no preventative mechanism for these assessments and the triggering of their treatment.

At the base of it all is the racism allowed in the U.S. military, which has its own schizophrenia of supposedly helping and hating foreigners, including sons and daughters of immigrants. It's gone from calling Vietnamese "gooks" to calling Iraqis "towel heads." It's gone from the My Lai Massacre to Abu Ghraib. There's a whole ignorant, sick subculture that needs to be rooted out of the military. Americans need to remember that the destabilization of the Middle East started with unfounded fears of Iraq having "weapons of mass destruction." No one in the U.S. was ever held accountable for this mistake.

KK: It sounds like that would definitely have an impact on anyone. How did that experience inform you about your life?

GK: It made me angry at the quiet acquiescence of some educated Japanese Americans who were aware of the illness but did nothing to help their own group of warriors. They preferred to perpetuate the warrior image. There were the parades and medals, but no concerted effort to treat PTSD. I found support in individuals who were of different ethnicities. When I couldn't find any summer work in high school, my mom's friend

Holsum Bakery supervisor Jimmy Pahukoa hired me for two summers as a mechanic's helper; it enabled me to buy my first surfboard and save to go to college. Jessie Pang Lum hired me as a pot washer at Bob's Bakery in Pearl City during my junior and senior year in high school. I've tried to pay their kindness forward in my own way.

KK: How do you pay it forward?

GK: As a journalist, I've tried to reach out and write about Hawaiians and other minorities facing their own social and economic problems and tried make sure their issues had a place in the newspaper, like the farmers in Keanae on Maui who complained for decades about the lack of water flow into their taro patches and like writing about the Chinese contributions to Hawaiian history, such as the Hawaii education of Sun Yat-sen; he's known as the father of the Chinese republic in his country. I also did investigative news stories that no one had an inclination to do.

KK: What kind of investigative stories?

GK: Oh, I conducted an investigation into illegal sand mining on Molokai, after hearing complaints from Native Hawaiian Walter Ritte. After my investigation, the county shut down the sand mining operation in the early 1980s, and the area later became part of the state Natural Area Reserve. As a consumer columnist for several years, I worked with the late state Sen. Anthony Chang to pass a law requiring a "New Car Lemon Law" booklet to be placed in every new car in Hawaii. I had found out from consumers that car dealers weren't informing consumers about the state's Lemon Law and their rights to a full refund. I did an expose' on how county, state and federal officials were accepting complimentary rooms and food at the Kaluakoi Resort, while conducting inspections there; a county public works director was censored by the Board of Ethics and had to pay back his per diem to the county. I did an expose on a Reagan-appointed Native Hawaiian Studies Commission that determined that Native Hawaiians should not receive reparations for the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and that the U.S. wasn't involved in the overthrow; some of the commissioners had previously represented corporations against Native Americans, and I interviewed experts who said the Commission's study was shoddy. After six people died in Hawaii in three separate ultralight crashes in a year and a half, I did an investigation on how operators were violating federal rules through operating them as thrill rides. After the story broke, the Federal Aviation Administration flew into Honolulu from Los Angeles to announce it was cracking down on ultra light operators. Just this year, a bill was passed by the state Legislature requiring the courts to notify the family or guardian when a mental health patient has a hearing. The law was prompted by an investigation I did into a tragic murder of an elderly woman on Kauai by a young man who was released from a psychiatric ward by the courts, without consulting his family. A relative of the young man told me the family had called police to have him placed in the ward and wanted him to remain confined but were not notified of the court hearing and his release. The measure advises the courts to notify a family member, relative, guardian or friend about the hearing.

KK: What were you doing prior to entering Kalama Valley?

GK: I was working as a draft counselor/cook/janitor at the Off Center Coffeehouse near the university. It was operated by the Rev. Wallace Fukunaga and United Church of Christ.

KK: What does a draft counselor do?

GK: He basically informs youths about their legal rights to refuse induction into military service if they believe they are conscientious objectors. A conscientious objector is a person who for religious or spiritual reasons opposes the use of violence and associated activities and resists military service. I'd learned draft counseling earlier from the American Friends Service Committee. College youths would visit the Coffeehouse to get brochures and other information about being a conscientious objector. Sometimes, I'd ride on my motorcycle with a backpack of printed information to high schools that had invited me to be a guest speaker. A couple of times, I'd be going into the classroom as the Marine recruiter was walking out. I'd stick a map on the blackboard showing the location of multinational corporations' offshore oil drilling concessions around Southeast Asia and say, "Let me tell you why we're really fighting in Vietnam." (Laughter)

KK: How did that go?

GK: I thought it went well. I remember returning to my alma mater, Waipahu High School and some students were interested in pursuing anti-Vietnam War activities, including Mary Brogan and Gail Hamasu. Gail and Brian Taniguchi, who later became a state senator, were volunteers helping to fight the eviction of the Filipino community in Ota Camp in Waipahu.

KK: How did your draft counseling activities dovetail into getting arrested in Kalama Valley?

GK: Well, my conscientious objector status put me on a path of questioning the politics and institutions in the United States. When I was attending the University of Hawaii in 1967, I remember standing for 30 minutes by a tree-lined concourse and watching students go by and maybe just seeing a few Hawaiian and Filipino faces and a fair number of Japanese faces out of hundreds of white students, then later reading the newspapers about mainly Hawaiians and Filipinos and some Japanese from Hawaii dying while fighting in Vietnam. Hawaii high schools, especially those with ROTC, were channeling minorities such as Hawaiians and Filipinos in disproportionate numbers into the military, while they were somehow restricted from entering colleges, where they could have received a student deferment from the draft. The practice is called "institutionalized racism."

I'd dropped out of the University of Hawaii after completing my sophomore year. I was waiting to be assigned to some kind of alternative draft service and thinking I might resist and spend time in jail, when Kalama Valley came up. Well, it seemed like if I was going to jail for resisting alternative service in a war that was thousands of miles away, I might as well get arrested for an injustice occurring in my own back yard.

KK: Did you know anyone in Kalama Valley?

GK: I knew members of Kokua Hawaii were meeting at the Off Center Coffeehouse, and I had met one of its leaders, Larry Kamakawiwoole, who was teaching religion at the university. It seemed that if he was a leader in the group, it was solid enough for me to check out and go to Kalama Valley. I think it was about May 4 or 5, 1971 when I rode with a student named Ralph and went into the valley.

KK: How was it?

GK: It was a bit unsettling and exciting at the same time to see the number of police involved in the operation. I knew about the shooting deaths of the Black Panther Party members by Chicago police in the late 1960s—incidents that cast a cloud on trusting authorities to follow the law. The Honolulu police had blocked the main road into Kalama Valley, and there were Kokua Hawaii supporters outside holding protest signs. One of them heard that Ralph and I wanted to go in, so he told us if we drove a half mile down the highway toward Waimanalo, there was a break in the bushes and people waiting to pick up supporters to go inside.

KK: So what did you do?

GK: We did what he said, and sure enough, after going through the bushes, there were two people like ourselves waiting to be picked up. In a matter of a few minutes, a Hawaiian guy wearing just shorts and slippers drove up in a Volkswagen and gave us a ride. It was a crazy kind of a ride on dusty dirt roads and dry brush. Soon thereafter, a police helicopter began following us, and I guess the driver whose name was Red didn't want to reveal his route so he drove around and around mounds of dirt for a while, then he parked among high mounds of construction dirt where the helicopter couldn't land. He got out of the car and laughed at the police. There was no place for the helicopter to land safely. Red, who I later learned was related to Kalama Valley resident Moose Lui, waited for the helicopter to run out of fuel and fly away, before continuing to Kokua Hawaii's headquarters.

KK: How was it once you got to the headquarters?

GK: The headquarters was a shack near George Santos' house. Kokua Hawaii seemed fairly organized. What impressed me was that some Hawaiians were taking the lead in this eviction struggle, and there were a good number of local people including older adults involved in it. The process was fairly democratic. Kokua Hawaii had a steering committee that made decisions and generally sought consensus from the larger group of supporters. I'd been on the periphery of protests against the Vietnam War at the University of Hawaii but couldn't support it because of the style of leadership. It seemed that decisions were made off-the-cuff by individuals vying for attention and the group had no control over their membership.

KK: What style of leadership were you referring to?

GK: There were mainly white students from the U.S. mainland who attacked the U.S. military and seemed okay with burning the American flag. From where I was coming from back then, I was opposed to the war, not the U.S. military which served at the will of U.S. political decisionmakers, and I couldn't see myself supporting activists who burned the American flag. My uncles and my father had served in the U.S. Army. One of my uncles died in Okinawa fighting in World War II against Imperial Japan. My father was a sergeant in the 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry who received a Silver Star rescuing Texans in the Vosges Forest. On the other hand, the Kalama Valley struggle involved fighting an eviction of local people, including Hawaiians. To me, it was an opportunity to point out that while Hawaiians were dying on the battlefields in Vietnam, they were being evicted from lands in Hawaii. That was a huge contradiction and an injustice. I wasn't alone in that feeling. In Kalama Valley, there were Hawaiians who were Vietnam veterans who had joined the struggle against the eviction.

KK: What attracted you to Kokua Hawaii?

GK: Sincerity. If I was going to put myself on the line, I wanted to make sure the group was led by solid people. Besides Larry, there were people who had a lot on the line and were committed to change—Joy Ahn, a Waianae High School teacher and former aide to Congresswoman Patsy Mink; Honolulu socialite Mary Choy; former Annapolis appointee Linton Park; Soli Niheu, administrator with Kalihi-Palama recreation; KEY Canteen official Randy Kalahiki; and Kahuna Sammy Lono. Then, there was Carl Young, who went down to Mississippi in 1964 to support the civil rights movement, later joined the Peace Corps. He became a Kokua Hawaii member and later supported the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. They added a level of credibility to the struggle. Their presence could not be ignored. There was a fair amount of news coverage about Joy and Mary.

KK: What about Lono?

GK: It was the first time I had ever seen a kahuna priest make such a public appearance. Usually, I heard whispers among adults about kahuna priests cursing or curing someone. For the most part, they were part of an underground of Hawaiian knowledge. Apparently, the police, many of them Hawaiian, were familiar with Lono and also Randy. Neither of the two were arrested, although they were at George's house on May 11, 1971. Matter of fact, I remember Lono offering his wrists for the police to handcuff, shouting, "Arrest me. Arrest me." The police just backed off and moved even further away from Lono, when he began chanting. Of course, they had no problem arresting me.

KK: Was there any incident that changed the way you looked at the Vietnam War?

GK: The experience didn't strike me as significant at the time, but it was kind of hard to forget as time went by. When I was 19, I saved three Marines caught in high storm surf off Fort DeRussy. They'd paddled out and got caught in the sets about 8-feet high, lost their surfboards, and were screaming for help. They were about three-quarters of a mile offshore, and with storm surf waves roaring, no one on the beach could see or hear them.

Actually, there were very few people out there. There was a Native Hawaiian surfer out there, but he had caught a wave in. I waited for a set to finish, caught the last wave in the set, kicked out near them and gave them my board, and told them to kick to a channel as hard as they could. I told them to wrap their arms and legs around the board when a wave came and not to let go, and not to talk, just kick hard. It was their last chance.

KK: What did you do?

GK: I knew I could catch a wave and body surf in, but I stayed with them. I dove down about 10 to 12 feet and hung onto rocks when the sets came. I watched them flailing on the surface. Occasionally, I came up for air. I swam in beside them as they held onto my board and kicked to the channel where the waves weren't breaking as much. When they got on the beach about 25 minutes later, they were grateful, tired, and a little embarrassed. They asked me if I was Hawaiian, and I said I was a local Japanese, but that I'd been surfing for years. That's when one of them said, "You mean, we were rescued by a 'gook?'" I'd heard that term before used to describe Vietnamese but never people like me. The other two Marines apologized, and I shrugged it off and went back surfing, after they promised not to go back into the ocean. I began to hear that term used by local Asian veterans who complained about the racism in the U.S. military. It just made me sick. How do you expect to win a war when you cultivate a racist view of the Vietnamese? The answer was, "You can't."

KK: How did your activism affect you and your family?

GK: Emotionally, it was tough. Except for some close friends, I had no support; it wasn't something we talked about because quite a few of my Pearl City friends went into the military. I had little or no contact with my parents for years, especially my father who felt ashamed and betrayed by his own son. All my life, I had been told by my father and uncles that when your government calls, you go. That's your duty. I was channeled in that direction, joining the Boy Scouts, then taking martial arts like judo and karate in my youth. I was okay financially when I became a conscientious objector. I'd been living in shared apartments in Waikiki and near the university, since my freshman year and had been working, as well, first as a dishwasher, then later as a busboy and waiter at various restaurants and hotels.

KK: After the Kalama arrest, what happened?

GK: The police apparently couldn't identify a bunch of those arrested, including myself, so the charge of misdemeanor trespassing was dismissed.

KK: Did you continue to be involved with Kokua Hawaii?

GK: My involvement was gradual. I began writing for Kokua Hawaii's newspaper, *Huli*. Much of it was either about the Vietnam War or updates on different eviction struggles statewide. For a brief time, I was the editor. The challenge was in balancing stories about

housing and evictions and about the anti-Vietnam War and peace movement. There were quite a number of residents in communities facing evictions who were veterans, whose children were in the military, or worked for the military.

KK: How did you and the tenants reconcile these issues?

GK: I think we just had to agree to disagree about the Vietnam War. It wasn't like there were a lot of people volunteering to help the tenants fight evictions, and they were grateful for what help they could get.

KK: What kept Kokua Hawaii members together?

GK: Kokua Hawaii had a number of retreats where people had the opportunity to get to know each other and to work out a plan of action. I think what kept me attending was their collective style of leadership where everyone had the opportunity to express their views in a friendly setting. The people became my extended family by choice. Also, it broadened my experience about Hawaiian history and culture. We went on frequent visits to Kahuna Sammy Lono's place in Haiku and learned about ahupuaa and kuleana rights and his fight to maintain his culture. Sammy had been through a long successful legal battle to protect his access rights to his land and ancestral home in Haiku in the 1960s. He was also exercising his religious rights in growing and using awa, as part of a Native Hawaiian rites in defiance of federal drug laws. Native Hawaiian religious rites later played a key role in federal courts allowing Native Hawaiians access to Kahoolawe, an island then occupied and used for military purposes. I was also influenced by John and Marion Kelly. We were studying Marx, Lenin and Mao and reading the Blount Report about the illegal overthrow of the monarchy. I was also moved by reading about Japanese American labor strikes in Hawaii in 1909 and 1919-1921 as described by *Hawaii Pono* author Lawrence Fuchs. Through our readings and discussions, we became a conduit for a new way of looking at Hawaii history, one that appreciated the labor struggles.

KK: How did you become a community organizer?

GK: Kokua Hawaii had sent a couple of members to be community organizers and live in the Filipino community of Ota Camp at the request of Ota Camp president Pete Tagalog. Like Pete, they attended Leeward Community College. At some point, a television news report painted an extremely negative picture of the tenants' anti-eviction struggle. A decision was made by the leadership to send me in to help to turn around the situation. I moved in some time in early 1972. A couple of Kokua Hawaii members were already living there.

KK: Can you describe Ota Camp?

GK: The location was rural, with running water, electricity. Tenants had built their own homes or occupied homes built by other tenants. The community was connected from Kamehameha Highway to an alternative dirt road leading to the Waipahu dump. The

powdery dust from vehicles kicked up into our shack. Kokua Hawaii members Jim Young and Randy Yamaguchi had cleaned up the abandoned shack, chased out the stray dogs, and ran an electrical line from our neighbor, old man Panit's house, to power lights and a hot plate. We showered in the back yard using a garden hose. We paid $35 a month for the electricity to Panit. Randy and Jim attended Leeward Community College with Ota Camp president Pete Tagalog who was on disability from a refrigeration job. I found a job at the nearby Pearl Harbor Volkswagen as a lot attendant and brought my portable typewriter to write news releases and *Huli* newspaper stories. Jim was the photographer. As it turned out, I paid the rent and bought the food and supplies to support the Kokua Hawaii household.

KK: What was the problem with the television news broadcast?

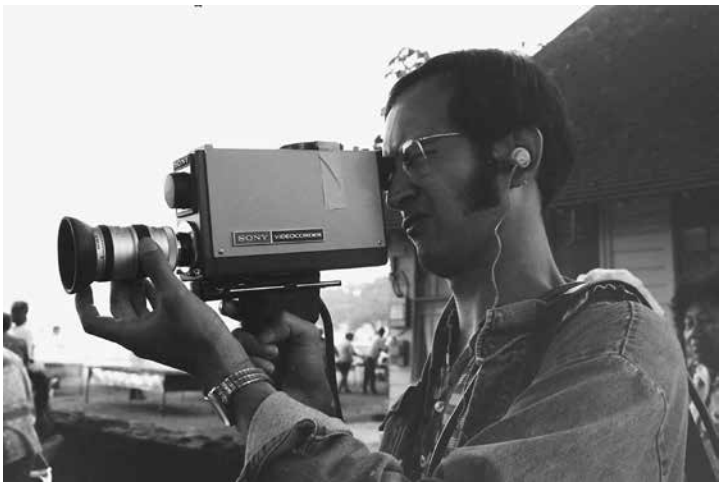
GK: It was misleading. The newsman, who spoke about the anti-eviction fight, showed a stack of junk cars piled one on top of another and people sitting on the porch steps, as if they were unemployed. Without talking to Ota Camp president Pete Tagalog, the newsman spoke to residents who either didn't know what was going on or were inarticulate and unable to express what the anti-eviction struggle was about. Pete was upset at the newscast. He told me the stack of junk cars wasn't on Ota Camp's property and were dumped there by outsiders. Most of the residents worked, and the remainder were retirees.

KK: How does one go about erasing something like that?

GK: You can't erase it. But you can educate news media people and make sure they speak to the right people. Kokua Hawaii members met with the steering committee and shared some ideas with them on how to handle publicity. At the next association meeting, Pete reminded tenants that they should refer the news media to him, if they see any news media person walking around. They should also notify him that a news media person was in the community. Within a month, the association had a cleanup in the community, then held an event day for the news media where Pete introduced newspaper and TV news persons to residents who were able to articulate their views. Pete asked that during the news media day, tenants do not sit on the steps of their porches or sit at all.

KK: What were the tenants asked to do?

GK: Well, they were told to grab a rake, hoe or sickle. But they weren't to sit down outside their house and do nothing, at least during the news media day (laughter). There was a tenant—Enrique Dela Cruz who used to be called "The Judge"—who was in his late seventies and retired. Enrique liked to invite guests to his porch to have a shot of whiskey with him. He was asked to keep his bottle inside his house during media day. But at one point, he forgot and he was on his way carrying out a tray with his shot glasses and bottle of whiskey to his porch, when Pete saw him and waved him off back into the house. (Laughter) The goal was to show that many of the tenants were working people



James C.W. Young was a Kokua Hawaii photographer documenting the eviction struggle involving Ota Camp and the Ethnic Studies Program sit-in at the University of Hawaii-Manoa. Photo courtesy of James Young family

and cultivating a Filipino lifestyle. A number worked as hotel housekeepers, as cooks, and golf course maintenance workers. I wrote a news release approved by Pete that was disseminated that day. Honolulu Star-Bulletin had a great feature story about the tenants.

KK: What else happened?

GK: Around that time, there was a really well-known poster of tenants at the International Hotel in San Francisco who were fighting an eviction, and I thought it would be a great thing to gather tenants together for a group photograph. Pete agreed and helped to gather as many of the tenants as possible. Kokua Hawaii photographer James C.W. Young took the photograph from the flatbed of a truck. Kokua Hawaii paid for the printing of more than 200 posters, and they were distributed all over Waipahu and low-income housing projects on Oahu. We also used the posters as a fund-raiser and raised $200 that we gave to the association. The poster put a face on the tenants' struggle, showing Filipino families, a bunch of children, dogs, and senior citizens united in one cause.

KK: Very cool.

GK: After a certain point, it was all about helping to build a community. Whenever Pete or someone in Ota Camp wanted to buy a pig for a party, I'd take them over to Kokua Hawaii pig farmer George Santos' piggery in Pearl City and introduce them to George who would give them a good deal. Kokua Hawaii members Jim Young and Randy Yamaguchi took the Ota Camp youths on beach outings on the weekend. Then, all of a sudden, somewhere between all this, Mayor Frank Fasi's administration called Pete by telephone one day and said they wanted to pay a visit and meet the residents.

KK: What happened?

GK: I remember Pete rushing over to our house one morning and telling me city officials who had just called would be coming in about three hours. I was usually the one who prepared the news media releases and fact sheets, and I usually ran things by Pete, but I didn't on this occasion. I called the news media by telephone and told them that Fasi officials would be touring the camp to see how they could help the tenants.

KK: Did the city officials show up?

GK: Fasi wasn't there, but it seemed like all the Fasi department heads were, including Managing Director Leo Pritchard. They were walking through the camp with Pete when the news media arrived including the TV news people. Suddenly, it was a media event, where news people were asking them what their plans were for helping the tenants. I guess Fasi was courting the Filipino vote in his run for governor and he realized helping a Filipino community wasn't a bad idea. I know one of the city officials was upset at the presence of the news media, and Pete said he hadn't called anyone. At a meeting of the steering committee later that day, I told committee members I had called the news media, and it needed to be done so that newspapers and TV stations had city officials on the record touring the community. The very fact they were there was an admission that they were aware of the problem and trying to fix it. To pull out without finding a solution would have shown a lack of leadership on their part. Basically, I told Pete he should blame me. That way the onus was off of him (Laughter).

KK: Did the city come up with a solution?

GK: On August 1, 1972, Fasi announced a partial solution developing dormitories for the displaced elderly in Ota Camp on city land at West Loch. Less than a couple of weeks later, ILWU Local 142 secretary-treasurer Newton Miyagi asked landowner Amity Waipahu Inc. to delay the eviction of Ota Camp tenants in Waipahu who received eviction notices and were told to leave on October 31. Both events provided a measure of legitimacy to Ota Camp's fight. The fight against the eviction began turning in favor of tenants. The steering committee's position was that all the residents in Ota Camp should be moved to West Loch. There were months of talks back and forth. Pete managed to keep the community together, holding weekly meetings and occasional protests in front of City Hall, seeking various individuals and groups support.

KK: What happened?

GK: Kokua Hawaii and other Ota Camp supporters, like Johnny Verzon and Leon Dagdagan who were associated with a Filipino group, kept helping to build support for the tenants. When Pete decided to participate in the 75th anniversary of Waipahu Town—the Diamond Jubilee on November 11, 1972—and needed coconut fronds to build a nipa hut float, I gathered up his son Darrell and his cousins in a truck and we went looking for coconut trees and knocked on neighbor's doors to see if they wanted their

coconut trees trimmed for free. I remember this happened on a weekday after my work as a lot attendant, when most people were home and before the Saturday parade. Most tenants were either at school or at work or too old, so I was the one who climbed about seven coconut trees and cut the fronds. I also ended up driving the flatbed truck carrying the float. It was all part of being a community organizer.

KK: What was the reaction of the parade crowd?

GK: The crowd was cheering as Ota Camp float and residents marched past them. They were clapping and some shouted, "Makibaka!", which means struggle in the Tagalog dialect. It told me Ota Camp tenants had won the hearts and minds of the public.

KK: So what happened?

GK: Gov. Ariyoshi who was running for gubernatorial election against Fasi eventually proposed that the state build houses on city land at West Loch for the tenants, with an option of applying their rental payments toward the purchase of their homes. Apparently, the Ota Camp Makibaka Association approached Ariyoshi for help in December 1973.

KK: Wow.

GK: The backstory was even more interesting. Quite often, visitors would attend the weekly meetings of Ota Camp Makibaka Association. One of them was Hideo "Major" Okada, one of the chief organizers of the ILWU at sugar plantations on Oahu and a very influential person in the Democratic Party. In an interview with Major in the late 1970s, I found out that his Japanese parents had been kicked out of their plantation home by plantation bosses during the 1919-1920 strike when his mother and his younger brother had influenza. He told me how he never forgot that act of cruelty. It was one reason why he became a union organizer. It also was one reason why he attended the meetings to fight the eviction. Apparently, Major advised Ariyoshi to help the Ota Camp tenants, and Ariyoshi did. In an exchange of emails with me in 2017, Ariyoshi confirmed that Okada was a major influence in his decision to help Ota Camp tenants.

KK: That's awesome.

GK: Yes. A lot of communities facing evictions began calling up Pete to come to their meetings and speak about his eviction fight. I remember Kokua Hawaii member Ray Catania was organizing against the eviction of tenants at Hikina Lane in Kalihi due to a planned expansion of Honolulu Community College. A lot of residents came out to hear Pete. We met at a corner apartment unit that had been damaged in a fire. There was no roof and only remnants of a hollow tile wall. Residents brought their own chairs. Pete knew these types of people and knew what to say to motivate them. His wife Sally actually worked in an aloha wear sweat shop on the same street. Pete was a great speaker and could hold people's attention, make them laugh, then give them the straight talk as a working man. Ray said Pete's speech gave the tenants hope. Pete also spoke at Waiahole-

Waikane, Nukolii on Kauai, and tenants facing eviction in Chinatown.

KK: What made Kokua Hawaii decide to get involved in helping to preserve the Ethnic Studies Program at the University of Hawaii?

GK: It was a joint effort of Ethnic Studies students and faculty and Kokua Hawaii and its supporters. I think there were many individuals and groups who helped to start and develop the Ethnic Studies Program in its formative years, including UH American Studies Prof. Dennis Ogawa, anthropology instructor and religion instructor Larry Kamakawiwoole, and other Ethnic Studies academic supporters Pete Thompson, Kehau Lee, Kay Brundage, Ross McCloud, Pua Anthony, Marion Kelly, and Agnes Nakahawa-Howard, and Noel Kent, Kathryn Takara, James Anthony, Mel Chang, and Guy Fujimura. Fujimura is now secretary-treasurer of ILWU Local 142. Kokua Hawaii's participation in the sit-in happened at the end of Ethnic Studies' two-year experimental period in the spring of 1972. We had heard rumors about plans to kill Ethnic Studies during the summer and merge the courses into other academic disciplines. A four-person advisory committee, professors from other disciplines, were chosen by the UH administration to provide recommendations. In Kokua Hawaii's opinion, the selection of the committee—none from Ethnic Studies itself—was a clear indication which way the administration leaned. Kokua Hawaii couldn't let that happen. You have to understand that Ethnic Studies arose because there was no UH institution charged with the responsibility of providing narratives about Hawaii minorities and serving as the intellectual voice advocating for minorities. At that time, the School of Hawaiian Knowledge did not exist. Pete Thompson, Larry Kamakawiwoole, Marion Kelly and others teaching in the program provided not only that perspective but also helped to develop the arguments to sustain various struggles. Many of those who were involved in Hawaiian Studies took Ethnic Studies courses.

KK: What happened?

GK: The sit-in was different than the typical sit-in at the university. We brought several ethnic communities threatened with eviction and other minority groups who were our allies together to retain the Ethnic Studies Program at the University of Hawaii. They included residents from Ota Camp in Waipahu, Heeia-Kea, Kahaluu, Halawa Housing, Census Tract 57 People's Movement in Kalihi, along with the Hawaiians led by Paige Barber. Supporters understood that some in Ethnic Studies helped to provide the research for these minority communities fighting eviction. John Kelly brought members from Save Our Surf to support the occupation as well.

KK: Wow.

GK: We had several hundred people on the first day occupying the university administration building at Bachman Hall and continued to occupy it, until the administrators provided some measure of fairness in its review of the Ethnic Studies Program. At one point during the first day of the sit-in, I remember University of Hawaii President Harlan Cleveland

coming down from his office and standing on the stairs, threatening to have everyone arrested for trespassing.

KK: What happened?

GK: I looked around at Soli, Kalani, and Joy, and they looked at me as if to say, "You're up." I knew to keep the crowd we had to achieve the moral high ground. I stood up and told Cleveland the crowd would not be here if he had done his job, and his job was to make sure the Ethnic Studies Program remained at the university. I pointed out that this was not just a student protest and that people who were here were taxpayers who paid for his salary and were leaders of a number of community organizations, and I went through the list of leaders.

KK: What did he do?

GK: He went back upstairs and sent down Acting Manoa Chancellor Richard Takasaki to negotiate with us. There was a lot of obfuscation in the beginning.

KK: How so?

GK: At one point, the administration officials were denying there was any problem with the Ethnic Studies Program and saying they didn't understand why we were holding the sit-in. As one of the designated spokespersons for Kokua Hawaii, I stood up and told them that our group would be willing to leave if the administration was to put into writing that the Ethnic Studies Program was a permanent part of the university. Well, the administrators were really quiet and none of them said anything. I kind of smiled and sat down.

KK: Then what happened?

GK: We continued negotiating. There was a student faction that opposed the sit-in and a teacher who wanted to gather students to support his tenure. But Kokua Hawaii was able to keep its focus on saving Ethnic Studies. After a day, it boiled down to the composition of an advisory group that would recommend the future of the Ethnic Studies Program. Takasaki had wanted the committee to be comprised of five UH administrators, five faculty and five from Kokua Hawaii who could be either student or community representatives. Kokua Hawaii countered that offer by saying we wanted the committee to be comprised of five students, five community representatives and the administration could pick their five out of faculty and administrators. Clearly, Takasaki's proposal was a move to co-opt Kokua Hawaii into a process in which the administration had the votes, and we weren't going to buy it. Our group stood firm, and Takasaki eventually agreed to the composition of Kokua Hawaii's proposed committee.

KK: Really?

GK: Yes. The administration signed the agreement about the composition of the advisory committee, and community representatives and students also signed it. We felt minority communities had a stake in Ethnic Studies and should have a say about its importance in presenting a multiethnic approach to issues. The agreement also opened the door for a review of the academic process involving Ethnic Studies by minority communities. There was a paradigm shift, and it's still happening today. Make no mistake. There continues to be a battle going on at the University of Hawaii between those who support presenting a western view of history, a tale of manifest destiny, versus a more pluralistic view of society that includes minorities and new immigrants in the dynamics.

KK: When you did these things like the Ethnic Studies struggle, did you ever get the feeling it would be successful? Or was it a surprise?

GK: I don't think we felt we had a choice. The Ethnic Studies Program was the wellspring for research and looking at the world through the eyes of Hawaii minorities. Ethnic Studies instructors were valuable to the movement and spawned new ways of looking at Hawaii's history. We knew with the ethnic communities supporting Ethnic Studies, the sit-in could grow from hundreds to thousands.

KK: What other groups helped?

GK: I later learned that besides communities bringing food during the sit-in to keep the crowd there, anthropologist Tom Gladwin made a significant contribution to provide food for the sit-in. Historian Walter Johnson and his wife Bette had great hearts. After the 1971 arrest at Kalama Valley, they allowed Kokua Hawaii to hold several retreats at their home in Punaluu.

KK: What is your view of LGBT activism?

GK: We had all kinds of people opposing the Vietnam War and fighting evictions in communities. Frankly, we didn't care as long as they supported us. The culture of our organization was very Hawaiian and very inclusive.

KK: What do you think about the outgrowth of the Kalama Valley struggle?

GK: I see a lot of projects happening today and just smile. To me, it's all about empowering and restoring pride in minority communities and working-class groups and respecting lifestyles in Hawaii. Ota Camp residents had an option to buy their land and house and did. I visited a few residents a few months ago, and they were grateful. Some of their children and grandchildren live with them. They can slaughter a pig or chicken and continue to live in their lifestyle. At the University of Hawaii, the threatened Ethnic Studies Program is now a department. Davianna McGregor who was a student became an Ethnic Studies professor and helps to organize educational ocean accesses to restore the former bombed island Kahoolawe. Lili Dorton, also known as Lilikala Kameeleihiwa, was a student during the Ethnic Studies struggle and later became the professor and director

of the UH Center for Hawaiian Studies. Kokua Hawaii member Claire Shimabukuro who was once a van driver for a Kalihi co-op that sold discounted milk, bread and eggs to public housing residents became an executive director for many years for Meals On Wheels on Oahu. Another member Edwina Akaka later helped to organize a sit-in at the Hilo Airport, pointing out that the state wasn't paying Native Hawaiians for the use of ceded and Hawaiian Homestead lands. Edwina eventually became a state Office of Hawaiian Affairs trustee and helped to initiate talks with the state for redress—a move that eventually led in part to the Legislature agreeing to pay $15.1 million annually to Native Hawaiians. Kokua Hawaii members Soli Niheu, Joy Ahn, and Gwen Kim were involved in helping to stop the urbanization of farm areas in Waiahole-Waikane and Heeia-Kea.

KK: What about associates?

GK: George Cooper was working as a radio announcer on Kauai and came to Oahu to meet with Kokua Hawaii in 1971 to find out about how to go about organizing. There was a Save Nukolii group opposing a resort development. Years later, George stayed at my place on Maui for a week while he did some research for the book he co-authored with historian Gavan Daws—*Land and Power in Hawaii*, exposing the relationship between developers and political leaders. George eventually became an attorney. He's in Cambodia working as an attorney helping to rebuild the country and recently has been part of a litigation team seeking justice for 3,000 people allegedly displaced by sugar producer Mitr Phol in 2008-2009.

Maivan Lam, a Vietnamese academic who had just moved to Hawaii, was drawn to Kokua Hawaii initially because our group organized a protest march at Hickam Air Force Base against the Vietnam War. She later supported Waimanalo residents facing eviction, earned a law degree, and has spoken before the United Nations about international law and indigenous rights.

KK: How did the Kalama Valley struggle affect you?

GK: It put me in a situation where I had to sometimes take steps outside my comfort zone for the sake of helping others and in so doing, I've learned to take chances and follow my passion. I had climbed all kinds of trees to pick fruit but never seven coconut trees in one day to help decorate a parade float. I'd never helped to lead a protest sit-in or expected to go toe-to-toe in a quick public debate with a university president. I found out I could think on my feet and I had a knack for writing, and there was a real shortage of minorities in the news business when I started writing as a journalist in the mid-1970s, especially investigative journalists. So I decided to go back to the University of Hawaii and get a journalism degree, which I did in 1975. It's been a great career. I've crewed as a journalist on the Hokulea through Micronesia, produced a couple of independent TV documentaries aired on public television, and written the national touring play *Legend Of Koolau* that's been to Los Angeles, Berkeley and Sacramento. Now, I'm working on another play.